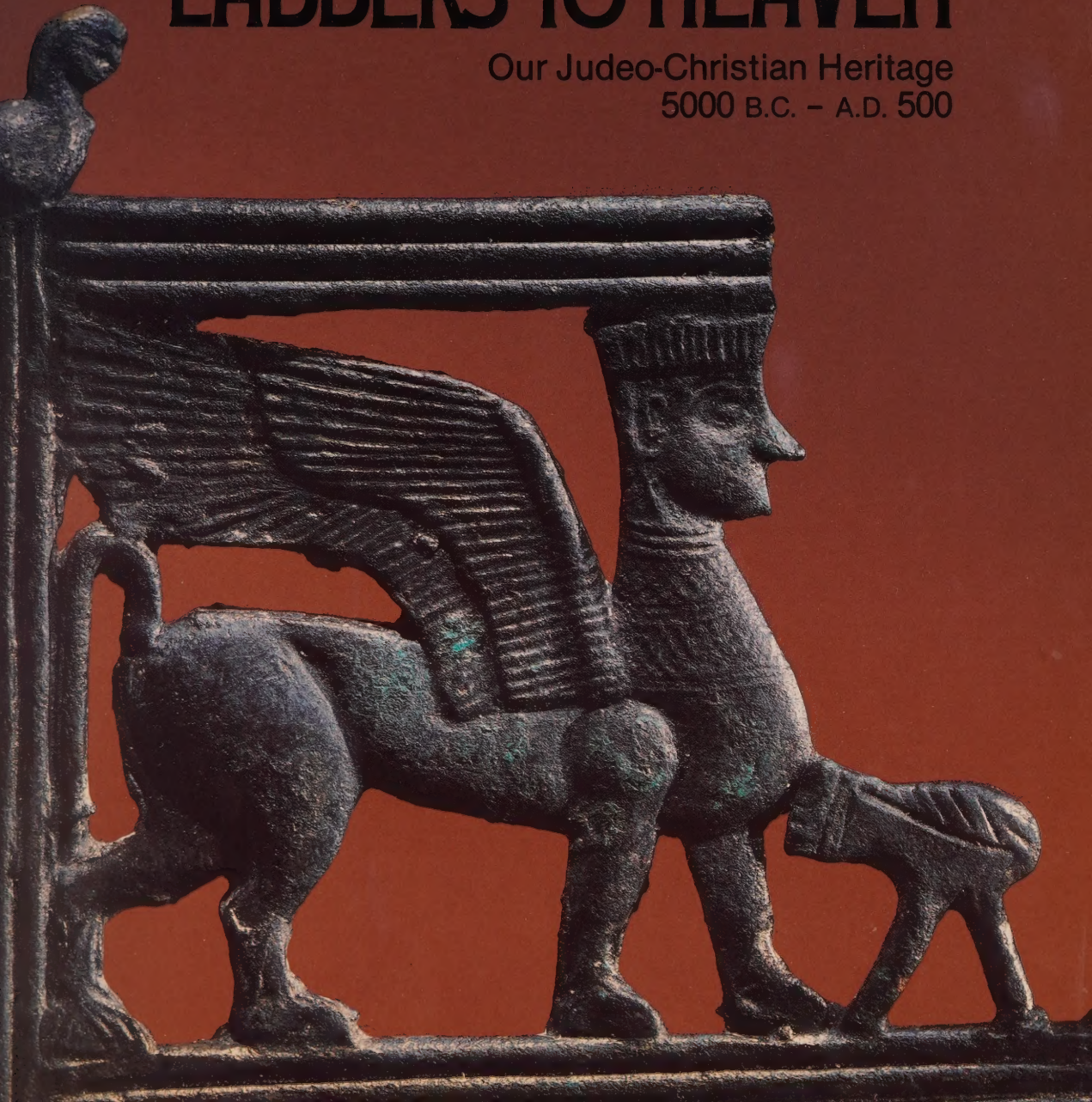
LADDERS TO HEAVEN

Our Judeo-Christian Heritage
5000 B.C. – A.D. 500



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Suzanne M. Heim

ROM
Royal Ontario Museum

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INTRODUCTION

In Jacob's dream, recounted in Genesis chapter 28:10–19, he had a vision of a ladder reaching from earth to heaven on which angels ascended and descended. This has become, in the exhibition, a symbol of communication between man and the divine being or beings whom he sees as controlling the multifarious activities of the natural world and his own fate. The "ladders" are the legends and myths, the rituals and moral codes which constituted man's faiths and religions over many millennia in the Near East and the Mediterranean world. Through them he expressed his theories about the working of the physical and supernatural worlds, and his efforts to comprehend (even to predict or control) the activities of those mysterious powers to which he ascribed final control.

More specifically, this exhibition attempts to show how the Bible, the Old and the New Testaments, has been for the "people of the book"—Jews, Christians, and Muslims—a never-failing source of inspiration and consolation. The Bible has brought together, modified, and purified many of the earlier views of the world current before the time of Abraham and from the centuries when our Scriptures were being written, compiled, and edited. As they grew in number and size, they achieved canonicity, that is, they became the accepted and authoritative standard of belief about the world, about God, and about man's duty to his fellow man.

In this exhibition, works of ancient art, from seals to sarcophagi, from tiny bronze representations of gods and goddesses to monuments extolling some human accomplishment, from the objects of everyday use to the ritual objects used in the sacred service of the gods or of God, are brought together to illustrate the Bible; here the personalities, the peoples, the historic events, the legends and myths, the laws and customs of the past, which have, until recently, been known to us only, or chiefly, through the

pages of Holy Writ, come to life in their own right. Their appearance in our Bible shows how our Scriptures have embodied these insights while proclaiming their own revelations.

We can see, in our own time, how a repudiation of the norms established for human behaviour in the Bible has led to the horrors of racism, of intolerance, of persecution, of oppression, torture, and death. This is a time for declaring anew the validity of the long human experience embodied in our Scriptures.

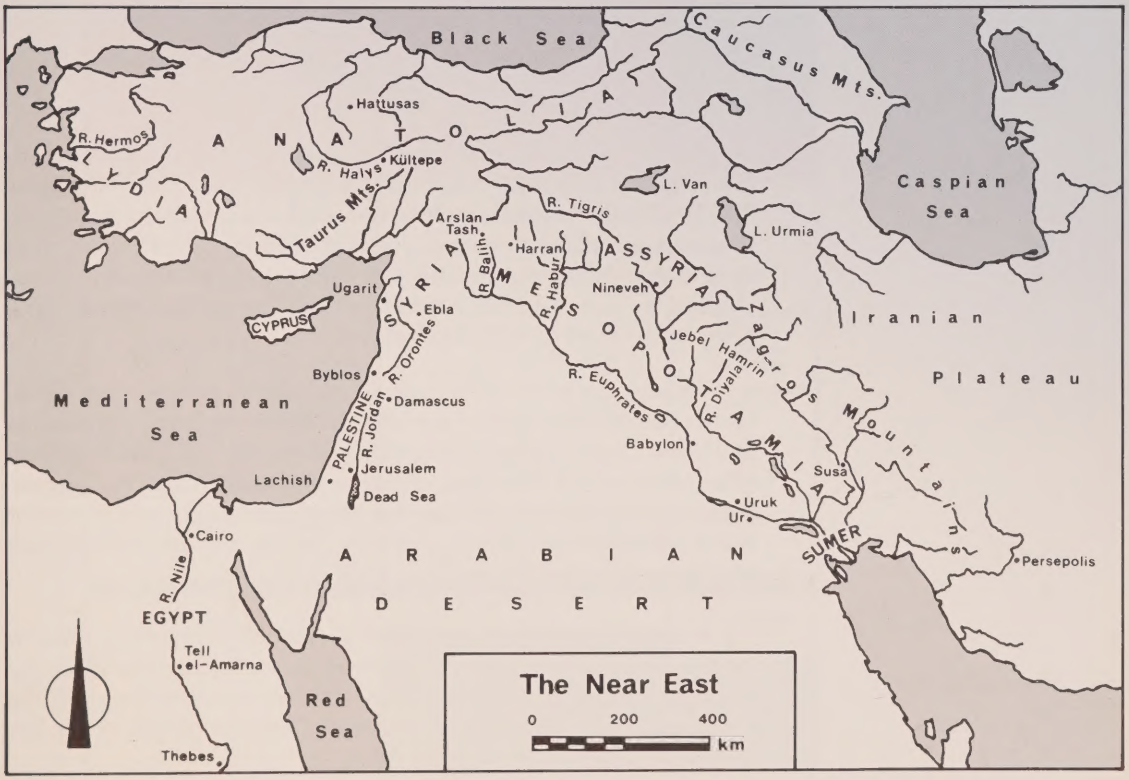
Thirty-five years ago Dr. Elie Borowski, a Canadian citizen of Polish extraction who suffered deeply from the loss of his family in the tragedies which preceded and accompanied the Second World War, set about the task of building up this valuable collection. Dr. Borowski made it his resolve to refute the twisted views of human morality and common decency which lay at the root of those sins against humanity by attempting to restore the values of the Bible. Because Dr. Borowski is a lover of art and a scholar of the most ancient past, his imagination was kindled by the possibility that the past could come to the rescue of the present. He believes that the beauty and imagination of past ages can instil in people of today a respect for the ethical standards and the love and fear of God which became the ideal of those ages.

Dr. Borowski's theological and biblical studies at the Collegio Rabbinico Italiano in Florence and at the Pontificio Istituto Biblico in Rome, as well as his literary, philosophical, and art historical studies at the universities and museums of Florence, Paris, and Geneva, enabled him to acquire the theoretical knowledge of the objects he was subsequently to collect. For the last quarter-century he has advised, and procured archaeological artifacts for, major private collections and museums, thus putting this theory to the practical test. Through his education and his own personal tragedy he achieved the incentive and knowledge; through daily handling of objects and through meeting the challenges of establishing authenticity, provenance, and cultural affinity he had the opportunity to collect; from such sources did this collection grow.

In February 1977 Dr. Borowski generously entrusted the collection to the Lands of the Bible Archaeology Foundation with the purpose of securing the establishment of the collection permanently in Canada. The

Foundation will also have a branch in Israel, preferably in Jerusalem—a city holy to the three biblical religions—which will be guided entirely by the Scientific Committee of the Foundation. Only a small part of the collection is on view in this exhibition but we who are the directors of the Foundation and, as such, custodians for Canada and the world of these treasures from the past, hope that the vision of Dr. Borowski will find a responsive chord in your minds and spirits.

A.D. Tushingham, President
Lands of the Bible Archaeology Foundation



Now these are the generations of the sons of Noah, . . . Ham, ...

. . . Kittim . . . . Canaan . . . . Nimrod . . . .

And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel, and Erech, and Accad, ...

Out of that land went forth Asshur, and builded Nineveh, ...

These are the sons of Shem, ...

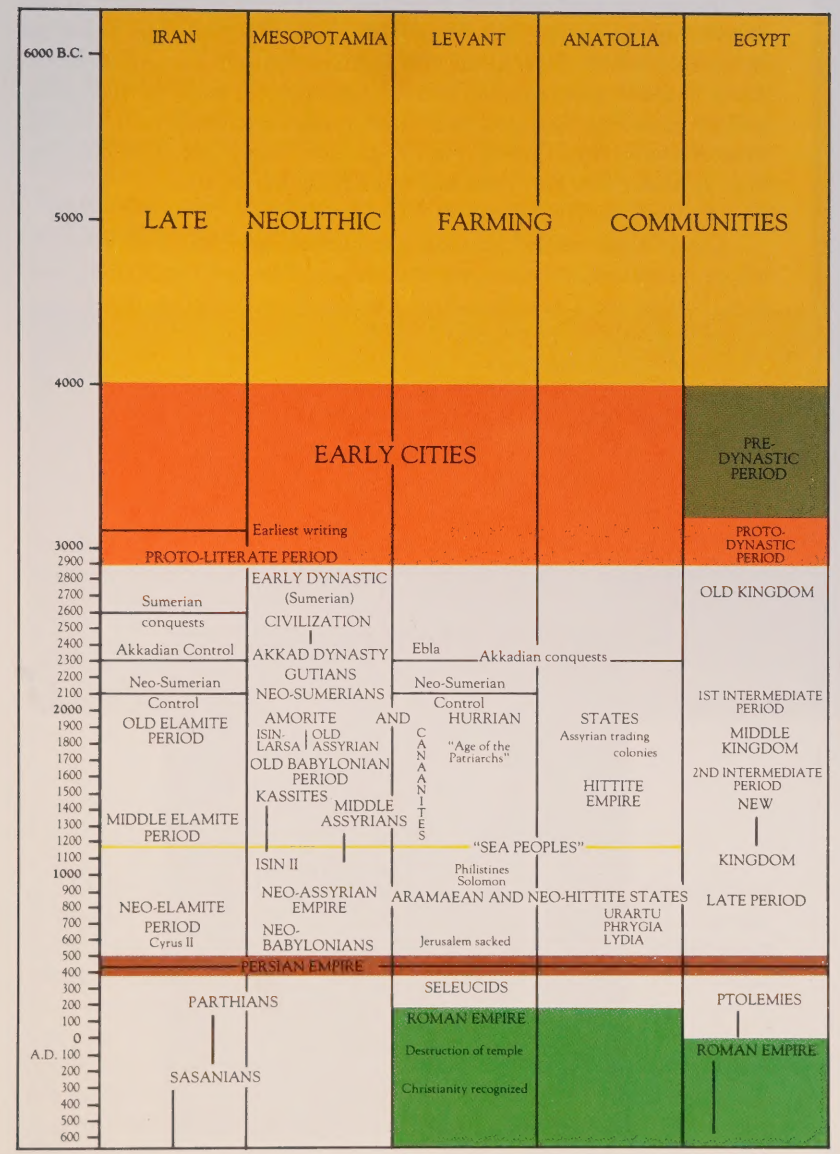
. . . by these were the nations divided in the earth after the flood.

(Genesis 10)

Many of the biblical descendants of Noah are represented in this exhibition, which encompasses 5,000 years of ancient Near Eastern art. The history of these nations is multifaceted, with ever-changing names and languages, as well as ever-changing relationships among the nations. That some of the biblical names are those of major pagan nations and cities emphasizes the fact that knowledge of these civilizations is necessary for a better understanding of the background of the Bible.

Through the arts of these civilizations, one can gain an appreciation of the cultural background of the biblical religions, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Despite the great differences between them and the pagan religions of the ancient Near East, certain traditions are shared in literature, both historical and legendary, and in themes used in the arts. Inevitably broad cultural ties are reflected in the arts, even in the most individualistic of styles or iconographic types.

A simple wheel-made pot with fine painted decoration is often as much a work of art as a well-crafted bronze or a stone sculpture. These and many other kinds of artifacts reflect the cultures of the Near East from the early farming communities to the early Christian period in the late Roman Empire.


IRAN
MESOPOTAMIA
LEVANT
ANATOLIA
EGYPT
6000 B.C.
5000
4000
3000
2900
2800
2700
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LATE NEOLITHIC FARMING COMMUNITIES
EARLY CITIES
PRE-DYNASTIC PERIOD
Earliest writing
PROTO-LITERATE PERIOD
PROTO-DYNASTIC PERIOD
EARLY DYNASTIC
(Sumerian)
CIVILIZATION
Sumerian
conquests
Akkadian Control
AKKAD DYNASTY
Ebla
Akkadian conquests
OLD KINGDOM
GUTIANS
Neo-Sumerian
NEO-SUMERIANS
Neo-Sumerian
Control
Control
1ST INTERMEDIATE PERIOD
OLD ELAMITE PERIOD
AMORITE
AND
HURRIAN
STATES
Assyrian trading colonies
ISIN-LARSA
OLD ASSYRIAN
CANAANITES
"Age of the Patriarchs"
MIDDLE KINGDOM
OLD BABYLONIAN PERIOD
2ND INTERMEDIATE PERIOD
KASSITES
HITTITE EMPIRE
NEW
MIDDLE ELAMITE PERIOD
MIDDLE ASSYRIANS
"SEA PEOPLES"
KINGDOM
ISIN II
Philistines
Solomon
NEO-ASSYRIAN EMPIRE
ARAMAEAN AND NEO-HITTITE STATES
LATE PERIOD
NEO-ELAMITE PERIOD
Cyrus II
NEO-BABYLONIANS
Jerusalem sacked
URARTU
PHRYGIA
LYDIA
PERSIAN EMPIRE
SELEUCIDS
PTOLEMIES
PARTHIANS
ROMAN EMPIRE
ROMAN EMPIRE
Destruction of temple
SASANIANS
Christianity recognized

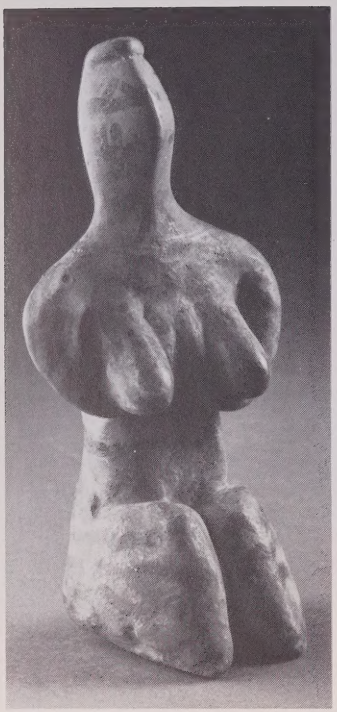


Plate 1 Painted terracotta "mother-goddess" figurine. Northern Mesopotamia or Syria, c. 5000–4500 B.C. *Height 10.3 cm.*

During the sixth and fifth millennia, towns and villages were widely distributed throughout the Near East. Their economy was based on agriculture and the domestication of animals, and most communities produced beautiful painted and burnished pottery. At many of these sites, painted terracotta figurines, with squat, exaggerated features, are found, some of them of the so-called "mother-goddess" type (Plate 1). Possibly fertility symbols, they may have had some ritual significance.

Out of these settled farming communities grew the earliest cities, whose agricultural economy was now enhanced by well-controlled irrigation. During the Uruk period, in the fourth millennium, these cities reached a level of sophistication requiring elaborate architectural complexes and a written system of record keeping.

The large site of Uruk (Warka, or the biblical Erech) was the most spectacular of these cities, with high temple platforms and pillared terraces. Among the goods found in its precincts are stone bowls decorated with animals in relief or in the round, possibly intended for ceremonial use. The animals are often modelled naturalistically with incised details, in the manner of the two recumbent bulls supporting a vessel (Plate 2).

Plate 2 Stone vessel with recumbent bulls. Southern Mesopotamia, Proto-Literate period, c. 3000 B.C. *Height 16.5 cm.*

When early pictographic tablets with administrative accounts appeared, so did cylinder seals. The sealing of containers and the use of seals for identification go back to the sixth millennium, when stamp seals were used. The earliest cylinder seals are often decorated with animals characteristic of the period. An example from Iran illustrates an early hunting scene with an archer shooting a goat, which is followed by a lion. The composition is completed by another figure wearing upturned boots and wielding a staff (Plate 3).

Plate 3 Stone cylinder seal and impression. Iran, Proto-Urban period, c. 3500–3100 B.C. *Height 2.6 cm.*

In the third millennium (Early Bronze Age), southern Mesopotamia developed into a broader city-state system, and the cuneiform (wedge-shaped) script now used on tablets provides us with historical information about events and rulers. Just as Genesis recounts Noah's family tree after the flood, the Sumerian King List enumerates the reigns of kings *before* as well as after "the flood", an event which figured prominently in Mesopotamian literature. With Abraham and his family living in Ur, and the background of Genesis being Mesopotamia, it is natural that legends and memories of actual events were shared. We have illustrations of a Mesopotamian fertility god, with vegetation sprouting from his horned

crown, battling a seven-headed flaming monster (Plate 4). As late as Revelation (12:3) we read about "a great red dragon having seven heads and ten horns", and back in Isaiah (27:1) of "leviathan the piercing serpent" which Yahweh seeks to destroy. Leviathan, the Canaanite monster, is similarly endowed with seven heads, thus continuing the tradition.

Plate 4 Shell plaque with deity battling the legendary seven-headed monster. Southern Mesopotamia, Early Dynastic III period (Sumerian), c. 2600 B.C. *Length 6.5 cm.*

To the subsequent period of the Akkadian empire in Mesopotamia belongs a cylinder seal depicting gods in the act of building a temple tower (Plate 5). One of the deities steadies a basket of mortar on his head as he climbs a ladder to the top, where two gods are erecting the structure with bricks. To the right of this group, other gods are waging a battle. The

Plate 5 Stone cylinder seal and impression with gods building a temple tower. Mesopotamia, late Akkadian period, c. 2254–2154 B.C. *Height 3.8 cm.*

scenes on the seal may reflect the Near Eastern epic of creation, in which the gods construct a temple for Marduk, in thanks for his defeat of the powers of Chaos and the leader of the demons of Chaos. In Genesis (11:4) we read, ". . . let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven . . . ", a passage relating to the construction of the tower of Babel, the gate of the God of Heaven.

The making of representational art was, of course, forbidden by Hebrew law—"Cursed be the man that maketh any graven or molten image . . . " (Deuteronomy 27:15). In the ancient Near East, however, votives, as well as images of worshippers and of deities themselves, were commonly made, and they are basic to much of our visual understanding of the diverse cultures. The image of a suppliant goddess is one that occurs often in Mesopotamian art. Statues made of precious materials were placed in temples but smaller bronze versions were also made, such as this example dating perhaps to the Isin-Larsa period (Plate 6). The goddess wears a four-tiered, horned crown, symbol of her divinity, and is clad in an elegant, flounced garment. Her raised hands indicate her intercession on behalf of a worshipper approaching a deity, or her role as a protectress.

Plate 6 Bronze goddess. Mesopotamia, c. Isin-Larsa period, c. 2000–1800 B.C. *Height 11.5 cm.*

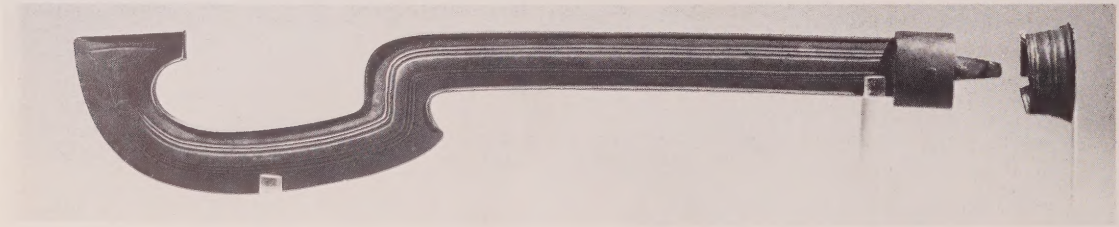
Detail of goddess (Plate 6).

Plate 7 Schist mould for casting figurines. Northern Syria, c. 1810–1740 B.C. Height 6.0 cm.

At the end of the third millennium, bands of Amorites and other nomadic groups created disturbances and generally disrupted the life and political stability of the cities. We now enter the age of the Patriarchs and follow the nomadic family of Abraham from Ur in southern Mesopotamia to Harran in Syria. Well-established trading connections among Near Eastern centres continued to flourish in the early second millennium (Middle Bronze Age). In Anatolia we have evidence of an important Assyrian trading colony set up by merchants at Kültepe (Kanesh). Among finds that may be associated with local cults here, and in Syria, are stone and lead moulds from which figurines were made. One example (Plate 7) is carved with a trio of nude goddesses wearing necklaces and horned crowns, on top of which sit birds and a crescent combined with a disc.

Egypt already had a long history of contacts with the nations of the Near East, especially with her neighbour Palestine (Canaan). By the Middle Kingdom, early in the second millennium, her commercial interests had widened and stimulated the Egyptian influence, which is seen frequently in minor arts and implements. The bronze curved sword (Plate 8), for example, is a traditional Near Eastern type of weapon; its decoration of an engraved lotus flower and stem undulating along the curved shape of the blade, however, is Egyptian. Other contemporary examples, with similar ornamentation, were excavated at Byblos, a major Canaanite port for trade with Egypt.

Plate 8 Bronze curved sword with engraved lotus flower. Middle Bronze Age. Length 35.0 cm.



In Mesopotamia it was the well-known historical figure Hammurapi who reunited and ruled over the major city states. Dating to this Old Babylonian period is a hematite cylinder seal, whose composition and style are especially elaborate and elegant (Plate 9). A worshipper, perhaps a king, offers an animal to the sun god, who has one foot poised on a human-headed bull. In another scene of worship, Ishtar, holding her double lion-headed club, stands on two lions, while a suppliant goddess approaches her. Next to another frontal goddess is a tiny water goddess, with rippling skirt, who holds a flowing vase and serves as a framing figure for the entire composition.

Plate 9 Hematite cylinder seal and impression with worshipper, sun god, and goddesses. Mesopotamia, Old Babylonian period, c. 1850–1700 B.C. *Height 2.7 cm.*

Plate 10 Bronze spearhead with boar's head protomes. Syria, c. 1500–1300 B.C. Length 44.0 cm.

Towards the middle of the second millennium (Late Bronze Age), as struggles for power intensified, the cities in the land of Canaan became more involved in diplomatic, as well as commercial, affairs. Among the luxury goods and metalwork that cities like Ugarit (Ras Shamra) produced were weapons, such as the finely cast bronze spearhead (Plate 10). The ring, which fits over the socket, is decorated with boar's head protomes with engraved details on the muzzles and heads. The motif of the boar is not a common one, and its appearance elsewhere in Hurri-Mitannian animal art may signify influence from the Hurrian element of the population in the Levant.

During the New Kingdom, Egypt continued to exert her power in the Near East and exercised control over many of the cities and overland routes in Canaan. She was not without competition, however, and had to vie with the powerful Hittites and Mitannians for control over the region. Egypt's role in biblical history at this time is best known for the period of the Exodus. Local groups of Hebrews in the region of the Nile Delta were employed by the Pharaoh for palace and temple construction projects. A faience foundation brick with the cartouche of Ramses II (Plate 11) comes from Qantir, a major site in the Delta. Although we cannot be certain who the Pharaoh of the Exodus was, Ramses II has been cited as a likely candidate, as has the king who succeeded him, Merneptah, who records his defeat of Israelites in Canaan.

For our information on the deities and cults of Canaan we are dependent upon the rich Ugaritic texts of this period. Temples of the principal deities, Baal and Dagon, have been excavated at Ugarit, revealing a tripartite plan with the sanctuary for statues of the deities at the rear. An idea of what some of these images were like may be reflected in statuettes found in the Levant. A bronze figure of a male deity, wearing a horned conical headdress and brandishing a weapon (Plate 12), may be the storm god, Baal. According to one Ugaritic text, it is Baal "who lets his voice resound in the clouds and hurls the lightning down to the earth", and whom the Hebrews consistently denounced: "And they brought forth the images out of the house of Baal, and burned them." (2 Kings 10:26)

Plate 11 Faience foundation brick with cartouche of Pharaoh Ramses II. Egypt, New Kingdom, Dynasty XIX, 1304–1237 B.C. *Length 35.0 cm.*

Plate 12 Bronze figure of a weather god brandishing a weapon. Syria, Late Bronze Age, c. 1400–1200 B.C. *Height 21.7 cm.*

Plate 13 Bronze female figurine with raised hands. Iran, Elamite, c. 12th century B.C. *Height 9.4 cm.*

Of other contemporary Near Eastern nations documented in the Old Testament, the Elamites in southwestern Iran are recorded as being descendants of Elam, one of the sons of Shem (Genesis 10:22) and a sealer of Ezra's covenant (Nehemiah 10:14). Various temple complexes and tombs have been excavated at Susa, the capital of Elam, and sites nearby, which have yielded sculpture and architectural decoration. The Elamites, known for their skills in metalworking both on a large and a small scale, produced figures of animals, worshippers, royalty, and perhaps deities. A small bronze female figure, possibly a goddess, is simply draped in a long smooth garment (Plate 13). She raises her hands in the familiar prayerful gesture, and thus may be a goddess interceding on behalf of a worshipper. A similar figure was found in a deposit near the temple of In-Shushinak at Susa.

By the time the Philistines came to full power, late in the second millennium, the great fortified cities of the Bronze Age had fallen. This was the period of the Israelite Judges (c.1200–1020 B.C.) and a bleak one for most of the Near East. After the conquest of the Philistines by Saul and David came the full flowering of the united kingdoms of Israel and Judah under Solomon (Early Iron Age). The detailed biblical accounts of Solomon's temple and palace, and their furnishings (1 Kings 6), may be better understood and even augmented by examination of roughly contemporary Near Eastern objects for spiritual, as well as secular, use.

The bronze stands, or "trolleys", cast by the Phoenician Hiram of Tyre, may be mirrored in small ones found in Cyprus and at Megiddo (1 Kings 7:27–37). A fragmentary stand (Plate 14 and cover), with one and a half of its four sides preserved, illustrates the artistic division of the stand into registers decorated with animals and offering bearers. The latter carry a sacrificial goat, a vessel, perhaps filled with oil and recalling temple offerings recorded in the Bible, and an ingot of copper. A cherub, or guardian beast, of composite nature appears to their right. Cherubim are common pagan images, as well as familiar biblical ones, used frequently in the decorations of the Solomonic temple, and most prominently in the "holy of holies" where they "...spread forth their two wings over the place of the ark..." (1 Kings 8:7).

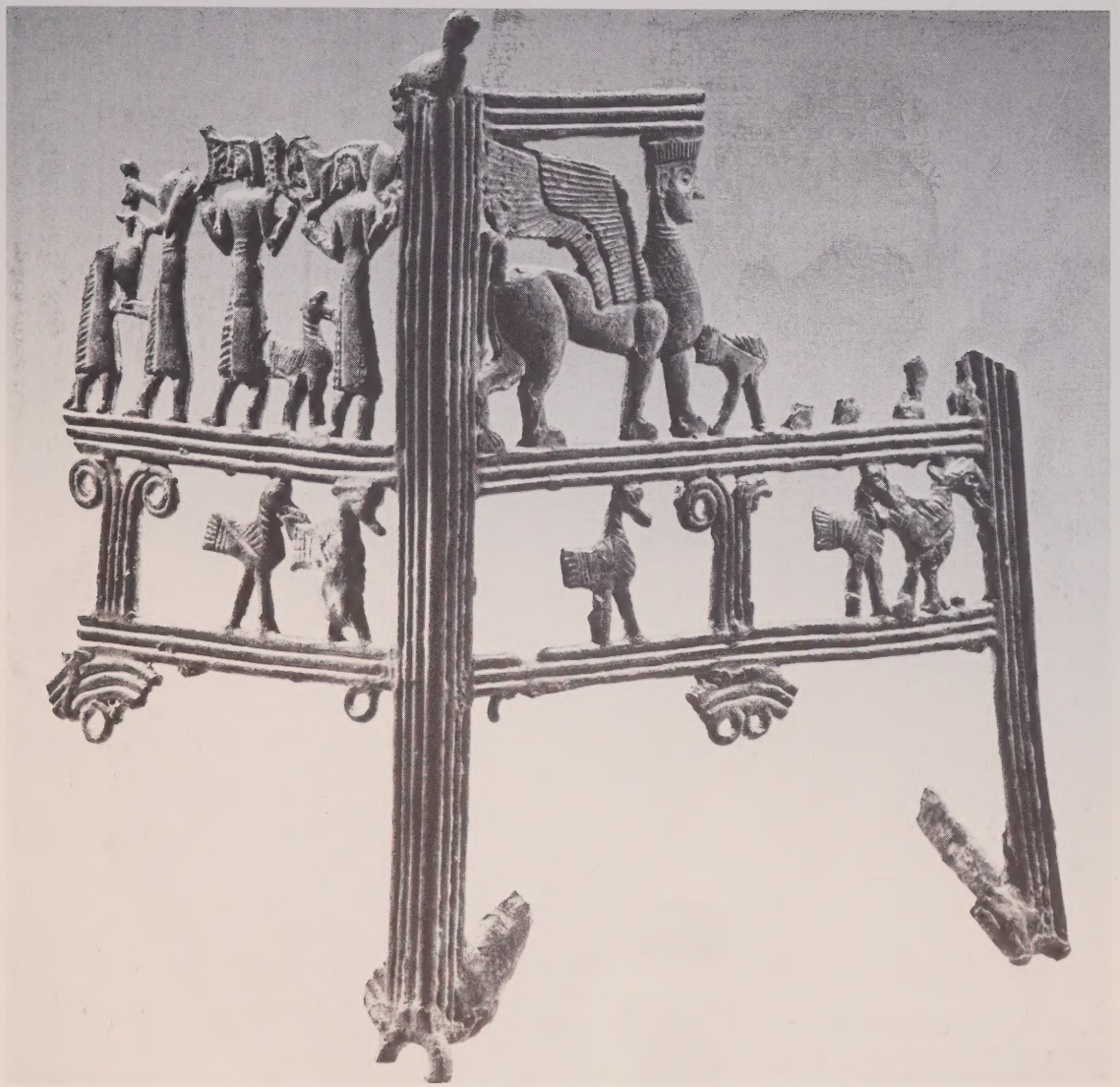


Plate 14 *Bronze openwork stand with offering bearers, birds, and a "cherub". Cyprus, Late Bronze Age, 12th century* B.C. *Height 28.0 cm. See cover.*

One luxury material used in the furnishings, not only for Solomon's complex but in contemporary palaces, including those of Ahab of Samaria (1 Kings 22:39) and Hazael of Damascus, was ivory. Delicately carved animals in relief and florals in ivory from Arslan Tash in Syria (Plate 15) reflect the themes in the decoration of Solomon's temple: "...he carved all the walls of the house...with...figures of cherubim and palm trees and open flowers..." (1 Kings 6:29), and for his palace "...the king made a great throne of ivory..." (1 Kings 10:18).

Plate 15 Ivory grazing stag and palmette tree. Syria, Arslan Tash, 8th century B.C. *Length 11.2 cm and height 8.5 cm respectively.*

An important development at this time is that of the Hebrew script, which ultimately goes back to the older Canaanite script of the second millennium. The Phoenicians then replaced pictographs with letter forms, providing an alphabet, which was the origin of the Hebrew and, somewhat later, the Greek scripts. An Ammonite seal of scaraboid type, with two birds facing a bucranium, lists above and below the decoration the first ten letters of this new alphabet (Plate 16).

Plate 16 Stone stamp seal (profile and face) and impression with Hebrew-Phoenician inscription. Ammonite, 7th century B.C. *Face height 1.5 cm.*

When the kingdoms of Israel and Judah divided, they had to contend not only with Egypt but also with the Aramaean and Neo-Hittite kingdoms in northern Syria and southeastern Anatolia. The power of these kingdoms, however, was far from absolute, owing to the Neo-Assyrian hegemony in the Levant. The relief sculpture of the Syrian temples and palaces reflects both the diverse Syrian cultural and geographical backgrounds and the influence of Assyrian art. An imposing stela made from a basalt boulder and carved in the Neo-Hittite style is decorated with a banquet scene in relief (Plate 17). Two deities are seated at a table, each holding symbols of divinity—a sceptre and sheaf of wheat for the male, and a spindle whorl for the female. The stela may have been a funerary monument, since banquet scenes were related to the cult of the dead.

Plate 17 Basalt stela with relief of deities seated at a banquet table. Southeastern Anatolia, Neo-Hittite, 8th century B.C. *Height 94.0 cm.*

The kingdom of Assyria's great strength lay in her military might, which fast created one of the most powerful empires of the Iron Age. She began by extracting tribute from the cities in Palestine, among them Sidon, Tyre, and Byblos. Eventually she launched full-scale attacks on them, laying siege to such cities as Samaria and Lachish, as the second book of Kings (18:11) relates: "And the king of Assyria did carry away Israel unto Assyria . . ." The Hebrews were among the many captives taken to the Assyrian homeland in northern Mesopotamia. Stone reliefs decorating the Assyrian palaces illustrate this event and others involving Assyria's enemies. A relief fragment from Sennacherib's palace at Nineveh depicts a Chaldaean family being deported from Babylonia, their home, after the king regained control of the area (Plate 18).

Plate 18 Gypsum relief with a Chaldaean family. Mesopotamia, Neo-Assyrian, Nineveh, palace of Sennacherib, c. 700–695 B.C. *Width 83.0 cm.*

This domination was not to last long, however, since the Babylonians, allied with Medes from Iran, invaded Assyria and ended her rule late in the 7th century (612–610 B.C.). Unfortunately for Palestine, the Neo-Babylonians were the successors to the Assyrians in dominating the Near East. It was Nebuchadnezzar II who sacked Jerusalem in 587 B.C., took the temple furnishings, and sent the Hebrews into exile in Babylonia as well (2 Kings 24–25). While the differences in politics and cultural background between the Babylonians and Assyrians are great, there is some degree of sharing in the religious sphere. A Neo-Babylonian style cylinder seal (Plate 19) illustrates a ritual scene which is characteristically Assyrian. Two winged genii carrying buckets fertilize "the sacred tree", followed by a figure wearing a fish-shaped cloak, which identifies him as a "fish-priest".

Plate 19 Cylinder seal and impression of ritual scene with genii and "fish priest". Mesopotamia, Neo-Babylonian, c. 800–600 B.C. Height 2.8 cm.

Shortly after the destruction of the temple, the Achaemenid Persians assumed power and created an even larger empire of their own. Their attitude towards Palestine, however, was radically different from that of the previous overlords: "...Cyrus the king made a decree concerning the house of God at Jerusalem, Let the house be builded..." (Ezra 6:3). With this pronouncement in 538 B.C., the Hebrews were free to return to their homeland, taking with them the vessels originally stolen from the temple by the Babylonians. One of the most important and impressive building programmes of the Persians themselves was at Persepolis in southern Iran. Probably used as a ceremonial centre, the complex consists of a series of halls and palaces, with a proliferation of columns supporting the roofs, and reliefs decorating the walls, doorways, and monumental staircases. Figures of the kings are represented—waiting to receive tribute bearers from distant lands, who parade up the stairways. Local servants are present to take care of domestic affairs. One such figure, a Persian wearing a pleated head-cloth, carries what appears to be a wineskin for the king's feast (Plate 20). The Old Testament itself provides details of life in the Persian court at Susa in the Book of Esther, in the course of which Esther becomes queen of Persia.

Plate 20 Stone relief of a Persian servant. Persepolis, 486-465 B.C. Length 35.5 cm.

During the expansion of the Persian Empire, even the Greek world was threatened. The eastern Greek states along the western coast of Turkey became satrapies of the Persians, and the meeting of these cultures quite naturally produced a blending of styles in the arts. A Near Eastern cylinder seal (Plate 21) is carved with a quite naturalistic mare and foal, combined with a rather formal-looking hawk and its young, whose feathers are rendered in an elegant linear fashion. The winged sun disc, an Achaemenid symbol, appears in the field above (Plate 21).

Plate 21 Chalcedony cylinder seal and impression with mare and foal and winged sun disc. Graeco-Persian, c. early 5th century B.C. *Height 2.5 cm.*

With the ultimate defeat of the Persians by Alexander the Great, the Near East was influenced to an even greater degree by the Hellenistic Greek kingdoms that survived Alexander. Hellenistic vessels and other decorative arts were imported on a large scale by the eastern states. Classical motifs were adopted and combined with indigenous eastern forms. An ivory ornamental fitting (?) (Plate 22) is decorated on the sides with Greek acanthus leaves, and the ends are carved with female heads, perhaps representing goddesses. This decorative configuration recalls Hellenistic female faces framed by leaves, but the cloaks and crowns betray a different source and stylization, perhaps to be sought in the Nabataean east.

Plate 22 Ivory ornamental fitting (?) with foliage and female heads. Nabataean (?), c. 1st century B.C. *to 2nd century* A.D. *Length 6.7 cm.*

The Hellenistic kingdoms were rather short-lived, owing to the increase in the power of Rome and her expanding empire. The annexation of Palestine in 63 B.C. led to resentment on the part of the Jewish population, and their ensuing repression resulted in organized revolts. These prompted the destruction of the main temple in Jerusalem by Titus (A.D. 70). Not until the 3rd century A.D. is there evidence of new synagogue construction. With the prevailing Roman art and architectural styles in Palestine, it is not surprising to find on a synagogue door lintel the relief of a menorah enclosed within a traditional Roman wreath (Plate 23).

Plate 23 *Stone door lintel with a menorah in a wreath. Palestine (?), 3rd to 4th century* A.D. *Height 51.0 cm.*

Throughout the periods of strife, the Christian community suffered as well, and it was not until A.D. 313 that Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire. This proclamation gave impetus to the production of more representational art, including funerary monuments. An important early Christian stone sarcophagus of Roman type (Plate 24) has scenes from the Old and the New Testaments, as well as the sign of Christ *(Chi-Rho)* enclosed in a laurel wreath below the portrait of the deceased.

Detail of sarcophagus (Plate 24).

Plate 24 Marble sarcophagus with scenes from the Old and New Testaments. Roman (Early Christian), c. A.D. 330–340. Length 208.0 cm.

The decoration of building pavements with coloured stone mosaics, a traditional Hellenistic and Roman custom, was eventually adopted by both Jews and Christians for their places of worship in the late Roman Empire. Stones were cut into tesserae and set to form intricate compositions and patterns in natural earth tones. A fragment (Plate 25) illustrates a shrine with balustrade and curtain drawn in the middle. Whether it is a shrine for the Torah, which held the Pentateuch, is not certain, since no specifically Jewish symbols are shown. Florals and birds, favourite motifs in pagan Roman mosaics, frame the building.

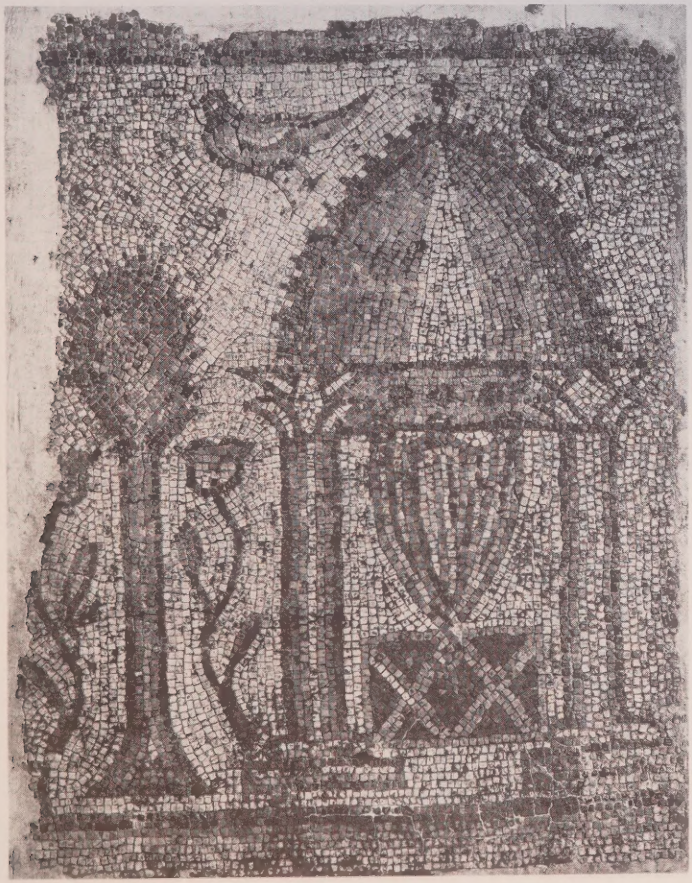


Plate 25 Stone floor mosaic of an aedicula with drawn curtain. Eastern Mediterranean, 6th century A.D. *Height 141.0 cm.*

Through the images and symbols in *Ladders to Heaven*, it is hoped that an appreciation has been engendered of the constant interchange among Near Eastern civilizations in biblical times. Despite the diversity of political and religious beliefs, the cultural ties among these groups compel the adoption of an ecumenical approach in any attempt to understand them.

Each group through its own spirituality sought the creation of important links between man and his God or gods—in other words, sought to communicate with heaven, as did Jacob who ". . . dreamed, and behold a ladder set up . . ." (Genesis 28:12).

Plate 26 Stone mosaic with peacock, perhaps as the Christian symbol of immortality; ivy leaf below. Eastern Mediterranean, 6th century A.D. *Height 88.5 cm.*

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